

## The Interaction between the Crusaders and Muslims in the East: Myth and Reality

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### Abstract

Historically, Christianity and Islam have had their fourteen hundred-year relationship defined by the era of the Crusades, a period that has often been characterized as a disastrous clash between two societies. The series of holy wars each religion mutually experienced through Crusade and jihad have undoubtedly had the greatest impact upon how their relationship has developed throughout the years. The long-standing realities that contributed so greatly to the generated perceptions have persisted even into contemporary times.

Unfortunately, many of the perceptions are true, especially those emphasizing deeply rooted hatred between the followers of the two religions, which resulted in fanatic intolerance. Once the era of crusading warfare had begun, there was seemingly no way to stop it, and with recurring periods of conflict grew the distrust, misunderstanding, and often outright hatred between followers of the two religions. Control of Jerusalem, sacred ground of the three religions of Abraham, has undoubtedly been a central focus of crusading warfare, which was to be the ebb and flow in the eastern Mediterranean world for several hundred years; a period of intense religious confliction for what the leaders of each faith believed, and argued to be waging on behalf of a just cause. Yet, despite the obvious examples of intolerance and violence that have been labelled as characteristics of Crusades, there remains more to be undertaken in hopes of gaining a perfect view. Perceptions and understanding of the relationship between Muslims and Christians during the Crusades are subject to revision. This research will try to define who the Crusaders were, the interactions between them and the Muslims, their views about each other, and the approaches of both religions – Islam and Christianity – during the Crusades.

**Keywords:** Crusaders, Muslims, Myth, Reality, Interaction.

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## Introduction

When Pope Urban II announced his intention to deliver the Holy Land from the assumed infidels (Muslims) at the Council of Clermont (1095), the response of the audience was immediate and phenomenal: 'God wills it' was their answer. Impatiently, the common people sold their belongings at whatever price and started their Crusading expedition<sup>1</sup>. The difficulty in defining the Crusades springs from the various and violent emotions they move in different people, ranging from the greatest achievements according to some, to the most absurd and cruel enterprise in human history, according to others; the Crusades were a controversial question of unique interest. Until now an unambiguous and generally accepted definition of the Crusades is incomplete; only late in the twelfth century did the terms 'Crusade and Crusaders' (signed with the cross) come into use. Previously, there was not a certain word or expression to denote exactly a Crusade; a general passage – the business of Christ – pilgrimage – or euphemistic expressions were usually used<sup>2</sup>.

Riley-Smith, a modern Crusader historian, dedicated his *What Were the Crusades?* to finding a comprehensive definition of a Crusade. He stated:

A Crusade was a manifestation of the Christian Holy War, fought against the infidels in the East, in Spain and in Germany and against heretics ... because it was Christ's own enterprise ... it was not merely justifiable but was positively holy. Legitimate authorisation was given to it by the Pope as head of Christendom and representative of Christ, rather than by a temporal ruler. At least some of the participants took a vow which subordinated them to the church and assured some papal control over them in matters other than the actual waging of war. A Crusade was considered as a form of pilgrimage and pilgrimage terminology ... They were also granted indulgences and when they were not engaged in war in the East these were specifically related to

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1. T. Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History*, Oxford, 2005 Pp. 32, 48.

2. C. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: model sermons for the preaching of the cross*, Cambridge press. 2000, Pp 105 173.

those given to Crusaders in the Holy Land<sup>3</sup>

Purcell, another modern critic, agrees with Riley-Smith on many points but he specifies that the Holy Land is the goal of the Crusade proper<sup>4</sup>. The French historian, Rousset, highlights in his definition the official granting of ecclesiastical privileges to the participants, the direct or indirect [recovery] of the Holy Land, in addition to the papal decree and the presence of a papal legate in any Crusade proper. In accordance with this, Rousset deems the First Crusade '*le seule Croisade véritable*', since it was a political necessity and reflected a wide aspiration which explains its success. All other Crusades, Rousset maintains '*ne furent pas des croisades véritable, ne portent pas tous les Signes qui la justifient et présentant des éléments corrupteurs*'<sup>5</sup>. Rousset thinks that the Crusade of Fredrick II, which regained Jerusalem by means of negotiation, was a pseudo-Crusade; it deviated from the Crusader path through '*les moyens employés*', i.e. negotiation, peaceful means. The Crusade movement, after the First Crusade, in Rousset's view, quickly lost its purity. Finucane like Rousset restricts the definition of a Crusade proper to the First, which was different from other Crusades in many ways, most notably in its idealism<sup>6</sup>. There is perhaps no other city in the world that has drawn the continued attention of the world community as much as the city of Jerusalem, especially among the adherents of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The city's religious centrality has generated its historical and political importance, as well as its symbolic impact, but its religious position has also been at the root of a considerable controversy<sup>7</sup>.

3. Riley-Smith, J. *What the Crusades?* London. 1977. p 74.

4. Purcell, M, Changing Views of the Crusade in the Thirteenth Century, *Journal of Religious History* 2: 3-19. 1972 ,Pp 3-19.

5. Rousset, op. cit., p 19.

6. Finucane, R. *Soldiers of the Faith: Crusaders and Moslems at War*, London, 1983, p 183.

7. Abu- Amr, Z. The Significance of Jerusalem: A Muslim Perspective, *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Vol, 2. no.2: 1-7, eds. Ziad Abu Zayyad and Victor Cygielman, East Jerusalem, 1995, Pp 1-3.

### **Idealism and Crusading:**

Another misconception in defining a Crusade is the restriction of the Crusade proper to the First Crusade, owing to its pure religious or idealistic ideology as Rousset and Finucane maintain. Bishop Stubbs extends this idealistic picture to all the Crusades which were:

The first great effort of Medieval life to go beyond the pursuit of selfish and isolated ambitions; they were the trial-feat of the young world essaying to use, to the glory of God and the benefit of man, the arms of its knighthood<sup>8</sup>

Many Medieval and modern Crusader apologists, like Bishop Stubbs, identify religious motives with idealism within Crusader ideology; and even the Marxist or anti-Crusading interpretation of the Crusades, which highlights the economic factor and makes religion a mere cloak to this enterprise<sup>9</sup> implies this conjunction between religion and idealism: condemning the Crusades as a mere adventure for material gain is an oblique way of associating religious motives with good intentions. Religious idealism and material prosperity were complementary rather than contradictory in the dictionary of the Crusades; measuring idealism by the criterion of absence of materialism is an anachronism or misconception which some modern Crusader critics have imposed while discussing Crusader ideology. Spiritual (idealistic) and secular elements were not merely juxtaposed, but harmoniously synthesized in Crusader ideology from the beginning<sup>10</sup>. Religious sentiment in Crusader ideology – far from being a cloak for secular ambitions – was sincere and in one sense ‘idealistic’ according to the Crusaders’ understanding of idealism. Medieval charters relating to the Crusades show how a spirit of sacrifice and devotion remained uppermost in the minds of the men and women who made the Crusades<sup>11</sup>. Gibbon remarks that in the light of the insignificance of

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8. Riley-Smith, J. *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*. London. 1986. Pp. 42, 47.

9. Maier, op. cit., Pp. 64- 66.

10. Ibid., Pp. 52, 61, 67.

11. Constable, G. Medieval Charters as a Source for the History of the Crusades, Pp. 73-89 in *Crusade and Settlement: Papers Read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and Presented to R. C. Smail*, Edited by Peter Edbury, Cardiff, 1985 ,p. 73-89.

Palestine for the security and prosperity of Western Europe, it is only 'religious fanaticism' inspired from the Old Testament that must account for the Crusades<sup>12</sup> Palestine, for the Crusaders, was the land that flows with milk and honey as they had known it from the Bible. The Crusaders' ambition, moreover, was not restricted to the Holy Land: even before reaching their ultimate goal, Jerusalem, a group of Crusaders were thinking of conquering Egypt, Babylon, and other kingdoms<sup>13</sup>.

Commercial, demographic, and economic factors were just one side of the Crusades; from the literature of the Crusades and other relevant materials from Canon law, emerges a picture of a spiritual-mercenary ideology in which there was no incongruity between salvaging souls and improving economic status<sup>14</sup>.

Pope Urban II offered the potential Crusaders at Clermont a dual and harmonious balance of spiritual and material benefits, after underlining the sacred nature of Jerusalem as the navel of the world, the land of the Redeemer, beautified and consecrated by his residence and suffering, he, nevertheless, did not forget to describe its riches: 'the land is fruitful above others, like another paradise of delights'<sup>15</sup>. The heroes of the First Crusade were the best representatives of this dual point of view; they were moved more by religious devotions than secular ambitions. Some knights settled in the East because their leaders did, and by no means were all the leaders motivated by land-hunger<sup>16</sup>. They all behaved the same: all quarreled over the captured cities and the treasures of their slaughtered victims. Being rich did not rule out undertaking a dangerous mission, such as a Crusade, to get richer especially with the additional prospect of spiritual enhancement; and being in need did not preclude embarking on the same journey for spiritual gain with the additional possibility of improving one's secular affairs.

All the leaders of the First Crusade accepted presents or rather 'bribes' from the Greek Emperor; one of the richest, if not the richest, told his wife in a letter that he

12. Gibbon, E. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 7. London. 1862 ,p 185.

13. Peters, E., *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 200.

14. Maier, op. cit., p. 5.

15. Peters, op.cit., p 4.

16. Riley-Smith, J. *The Motives of the Earliest Crusaders and the Settlement of Latin Palestine, 1095-1100*, *English Historical Review* 98, 1983 Pp. 721-736.

had doubled his gold, silver, and other riches while he was still in Asia Minor<sup>17</sup>. It was not only the bankrupt Tancred and Baldwin who quarreled over the conquered castles and booty, but also the well-to-do Bohemund and Raymond who did the same almost over every subdued city<sup>18</sup>. Raymond's behavior previous to and during the capture of Jerusalem is typical in showing the harmony between Crusading piety (idealism) and material prosperity; notwithstanding his sincere religiosity, symbolized mainly by wholesale slaughter of the infidels and by being the advocate of the visions and visionaries of the Crusade, he exhibited some pragmatism by sparing the governor of Jerusalem and his bodyguard in exchange for surrendering their treasures to him<sup>19</sup>.

As for ordinary Crusaders, they exhibited the same dual and indivisible aspirations that combined eschatological (religious) and secular tendencies in Crusader ideology; all the visionaries, the intermediaries between Christ and his people, came from among the poor priests. Yet while besieging Jerusalem, the Crusaders leaders could fill the pit around the Holy City only by bringing the poor: anyone who could bring and cast three stones into the pit was given a penny<sup>20</sup>. The poor formed a separate contingent in the First Crusade and had a king of their own (King Tafur). The anonymous author of the *Gesta*, in his description of the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem, was typical in striking a balance between piety (idealism) and materialism, and between violence and sacredness within Crusader ideology.

Our men rushed round the whole city, seizing gold and silver, horses and mules, and houses full of all sorts of goods, and they all came rejoicing and weeping from excess of gladness to worship at the Sepulcher of our saviour Jesus ... Next morning they went cautiously up on to the Temple roof (al-Aqsa mosque) and attacked the infidels (the Muslims) ... Some of the infidels threw themselves down headlong from the Temple<sup>21</sup>.

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17. Peters, op. cit., p. 4.

18. Krey, A, *The First Crusade: the accounts of eye-witnesses and participants*, Oxford, 1921, p. 213.

19. Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem 1095-1127*, Translated by F. Ryan, Knoxville, 1969, p. 71.

20. Hill, R., ed., 1979. *Gesta Francorum; or the Deeds of the Franks and the other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, Oxford, 1979. p. 91.

21. Ibid., 92,

The matter-of-course tone of this passage is very expressive; the author moves smoothly from seizing the spoil of Jerusalem to worshipping at the Sepulcher to massacring the Saracens. Another eye-witness of the First Crusade, and then a resident of the Holy Land, wrote the following after spending about twenty years there; the material prosperity of the Crusaders was attributed to the divine will of God, who enriches his people at the expense of the unbelievers; it is God who transferred the West into the East and Occidental into 'Orientals', and:

Those who had few coins here possess countless bezants; and those who had not had a villa, here by the gift of God already possess a city. Therefore, why should one who has found the East so favorable return to the west? ... God wishes to enrich us all ...<sup>22</sup>

### **Mythical Aspect of Crusader Ideology:**

Myth recites a sacred or a quasi-sacred history; although revolving around the past, myth is an image of a fictitious or unrealizable future or ideals that embody communal feelings. If ordinary individuals are perishable, heroes incarnate the imperishable spirit of society; the process of transforming warriors into heroes is the first step of the transformation from the individual to the collective level or from history into myth. Such myths make use of the past, enhancing the present and projecting themselves into the future<sup>23</sup>.

Ideology is not merely a set of beliefs or ideas but a collective force that fires imagination, fortifies will and nourishes enthusiasm; made up of deeply-held convictions and passions, ideology entails judging outsiders with prejudice, and the will to convert or eliminate them. Extremism and self-righteousness are the formula that transforms harmless beliefs into destructive elements in ideology; if history is total and individual<sup>24</sup>. The Crusades illustrate the role of ideology in indoctrinating all strata of society and pushing them to irrational extremes.

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22. Fulcher of Charters, op.cit., Pp. 280-281.

23. Asbridge, op. cit., Pp 3-5.

24. Rousset, P. *Histoire d'un Idéologie: La Croisade*. Lausanne, 1983, Pp. 7, 13.

Ideology and myth, therefore, have two primary aspects in common: the collective and the dynamic.

The Crusade movement had in itself the seeds of myth: it was wrapped and saturated with the sacred; it exploited the Biblical myth of an ideal society (the kingdom of God); the chroniclers, poets, propagandists, and even canonists channeled it into the written page; throughout at least four centuries ceaseless Crusades or endeavors to launch Crusades generated and fortified this myth. The returning warriors and wayfarers could not resist the temptation of giving their tales legendary proportions if these tales had not already acquired this mythic aspect in Syria, and then by finding their way to writing, these tales appropriated immortality and authenticity.

The speech of Urban II at Clermont (1095) inaugurated the Crusading movement and with it Crusader myth; the very answer of the audience, 'God wills it' strengthened the myth by ascribing it to the sacred. The mechanism of mythologizing the Crusade was infectious and soon Western Europe was overwhelmed by the 'New Exodus' of the new chosen people. Miracles of all kinds, including a city floating in the sky (heavenly Jerusalem), authenticated the newly born myth. A span of time is needed to transform warriors into heroes and history into myth, but in the case of the Crusades the speed with which this transformation took place was unique; Peter the Hermit is the best example; traveling through France preaching the Crusade, Peter quickly was venerated as semi-divine or the prophet of the Crusade: he healed the sick, returned the prostitutes to their homes, and he imparted his sacredness to his ass whose hair was plucked out by the faithful to be treasured as relics<sup>25</sup>. Peter led the impatient faithful, who could not wait until the official date set by the Pope, in what is known as the People's Crusade<sup>26</sup>. The growth of myth of Peter reached its fullness in *La Chanson d'Antioche* and *La Chanson de Jerusalem* where Peter becomes the 'Abraham' of the Crusade, receiving a message from God to liberate the Holy Sepulcher; before the Crusade, Peter was made a pilgrim to the Holy Land where

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25. Morris, C. Propaganda for War, the Dissemination of the Crusading Ideal in the Twelfth Century, *Studies in Church History* 20: 79-101, 1983, p. 82.

26. Asbridge, op. cit., p. 81.



he was instructed by God in a vision to liberate the Holy Sepulcher from the hands of the ungodly people (the Muslims)<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, Peter returned to the West and met the Pope who gave his approval for the first preaching of the Crusade; the People's Crusade set off but was defeated in Asia Minor; Peter escaped and had his second audience with the Pope, who gave his blessing for the second preaching of the Crusade. These changes in the plot of *La Chanson d'Antioche* highlighted the role of Peter the Hermit as the real initiator of the Crusade, and to the popular element of the Crusade. Unfortunately, the original manuscripts of *La Chanson d'Antioche* and *La Chanson de Jerusalem* have been lost and what we have now is revised versions by *Graindor de Douai*, occasioned by the turmoil of the fall of Jerusalem (1187) and the Third Crusade. In the Grail stories, the Grail symbolizes the Holy Sepulcher or in a boarder sense Jerusalem or the Holy Land. The cross and Jerusalem had a shattering effect upon Christendom<sup>28</sup>.

### **Crusader Ideology and the Concept of History:**

The process of fusing conceptuality with actuality is the formula and the starting point for forming ideology; this fusion results in changing the concepts themselves and the people concerned, and the latter start acting in awareness of the new reality. On the individual level, the formation of the ego is similar to the formation of communal or national identity-ideology; extremism is the ingredient that transforms harmless beliefs into destructive elements in the process of conceiving ideology; made up of deeply-held beliefs and passions and the conviction of self-righteousness, ideology entails judging the enemy with prejudice and the will to convert or to eliminate those who do not conform<sup>29</sup>. In this sense, ideology is a dynamic thing that affects present and projects itself into the future; once formed, the various constituents of a certain ideology may be forced underground or may undergo some changes, major as minor, but they remain buried in the consciousness of people to burst out any time.

27. Asbridge, op.Cit., Pp. 79, 257.

28. Adolf, H. *Visio Pacis, Holy City and Grail*, University Park, PA, 1960; Asbridge, op. cit., p. 316

29. Maier, op. cit., Pp. 48, 50, 52, 56.

Crusader ideology – with its main components of chosen people, holy war, and holy land – epitomizes the ambivalent attitude of Christendom in relation to others, to themselves, and to God. It is the culmination of a long Judeo-Christian tradition revolving around the expected Kingdom of God that will bring salvation to the faithful and destruction to their enemies. Therefore a survey of the biblical and pre-Crusade concept of history is imperative to put Crusader ideology in the context of this long tradition<sup>30</sup>.

### Portrait of Muslims

One is astonished to realize the disparity between the images of Crusader literature and reality. Confident of being the new chosen people, the Crusaders thought of their enemies (the Muslims) simply as the enemies of God who were hindering the realization of the Godly kingdom; as a scapegoat or a surrogate victim is supposed to absorb the sins of the sacrifices, the portrait of the Saracens (Muslims), in many of its details, is a displaced self-projecting picture of the Crusaders' sinful and cruel self. Notwithstanding the sense of continuity in identifying the Muslims with the idolaters of the Old Testament, another sense of discontinuity was preserved by making a distinction, consciously or unconsciously, between the Muslims whom the Prophet Mohammad had converted, the Arabs who translated Aristotle, and the Muslims whom the Christians were defeating in Spain<sup>31</sup>.

The etymology of the word 'Saracen', although controversial, is most likely to be derived from an Arabic origin '*Sharq*' or '*Sharqiyun*', (East and Easterners) especially if compared to its Greek equivalent '*Sarakenos*' which refers to the land and people of Palestine, or Arabia and Arabians<sup>32</sup>. Some Western writers thought that the Arabs themselves had called themselves '*Saracens*' to claim belonging to the blessed line of Sarah and Abraham.

30. Lehtonen, T. and Jensen, K., *Medieval History Writing and Crusader Ideology*, Helsinki, 2005 ,Pp. 109, 197.

31. Daniel, N. *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe*. London. 1979, p. 295.

32. Ibid., p. 35; Hitti, P. *History of the Arabs*, London, 1951 ,Pp. 42, 44; Wise, T. *The Wars of the Crusades 1096-1291*, London, 1978, p. 41; Comfort, W. The Literary Role of the Saracens in the French Epic. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 55.3: 628-659. 1940, p. 629.

Polarization led inevitably to magnifying the differences between Christians and their enemies, devising new ones, and overlooking or not searching for common ground. Pointing out parallelism between the two religions would have weakened Crusader ideology founded mainly on segregation, and undermined the belief of the fighters in their salvation. The indulgence granted by the Papacy would have been rendered worthless if the absolute righteousness of the Crusader cause had been questioned. As much as moral issues are concerned, Saracens are the other extreme; Muslims who mock Christ at his ignominious death on the Cross<sup>33</sup>. The epithet 'dog' is used of Muslims literally and figuratively: Western biographies of the Prophet depicted him as an epileptic and a drunkard who was eaten up by dogs and pigs; some Saracens 'bray and whinny', and others 'bark like dogs'; Ambroise, the chronicler of the Third Crusade, described the besieged Muslims in Acre (Akko) as 'the unbelieving brood of dogs' (Chant III, 3433). The Saracens doggedness manifested the power of the Lord in punishing the unbelievers<sup>34</sup>.

The Greek Emperor's daughter, Anna Comnena, due to her classical education, presents us with an interesting portrait of the Muslims; it is a portrait with reminiscences from the Bible and other classical legends:

Slaves to drunkenness, wine, and Dionysus, for this race is under the sway of Dionysus and Eros, rushes headlong into all kinds of sexual intercourse, and is not circumcised either in the flesh or in their passion. It is nothing but a slave, nay triply enslaved, to the ills wrought by Aphrodite<sup>35</sup>.

Lacking any real information about their enemies, Crusader writers polarized when giving an account of the warring parties; the same lack of information led also to parallelism when such correlation had nothing to do with moral issues. As Christians were named after Christ, Muslims were called '*la gent Mahon*, or the people of Apollin or Tervagant (two main gods in the Pantheon). The feudal aspects on both the Frankish and Muslim sides were identical; trial by combat, which Usamah Ibn Munqidh (d. H 584/AD 1188) mocked as a strange way of

33. Gabrieli, F., *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, London, 1969, Pp. 208-209, 182-183.

34. Friedman, J., *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, Cambridge, 1981, p. 67.

35. Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of the Princess Anna Comnena*, Translated by E. Dawes, London, 1928, p. 249.

dispensing justice, was made part of the Muslim judicial system.

The Christians' belief in the mystery of baptism and its magical or divine power cleansed from sins and paganism was shifted to the Muslims with some adjustment; the principle was the same, the magical property of water to cleanse<sup>36</sup>. The Christian's practice of buying salvation with money from the Church was displaced and caricatured, Mohan advised his followers on how to secure a place in paradise: with two 'bezants'(gold coins) in one hand and two stones in the other, they approach the door-keeper of Eden!<sup>37</sup>. Mere coincidence cannot explain the identical minute details relating to the atrocities committed by both Muslims and Crusaders as described in Crusader literature; in his speech, which is the official beginning of the Crusades, Pope Urban II pointed out the cruelties of the Barbarians (Muslims) against Western pilgrims to the Holy Places:

Their (the Muslims) unspeakable cruelty was carried on even to the point of giving them (Christian's pilgrims) scammony to drink until they vomited, or even they thought the wretches had swallowed gold or silver<sup>38</sup>.

Monotheism was the criterion for testing any religion. In Crusader ideology – based mainly on the notion of polarization – polytheism is or must be the religion of the pagans (the Muslims). Confessing that Islam is a monotheistic religion would have undermined the whole issue of the Crusade by suggesting a common ground between the warring parties and hence questioning the validity of the Crusades as holy wars; such a confession, also, would have shaken the Crusader's belief in their salvation and the very foundation of the kingdom of God which they thought they were bringing about. To keep Crusader ideology intact the infidels (Muslims) had to be polytheists<sup>39</sup>.

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36. Shaw, M. *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades*. London. 1963, p. 375.

37. Daniel, N., *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de Geste*, Edin, 1984. Pp.143-145.

38. Peters, op. cit., Pp. 14-15.

39. Munro, D., The Western Attitude toward Islam during the Period of the Crusade, *Speculum* 6: 329-343, 1931 ,P. 332; Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, op. cit., Pp. 268-269, 275, 279; Skidmore, M. *The Moral Traits of Christians and Saracen as Portrayed by the Chansons de Geste*. Colorado Springs. 1935. p. 32.

Throughout the epic and historical accounts of the Crusades, the polytheism of Muslims is taken for granted; Pope Urban II, at Clermont, incites Christians to avenge the disgraceful act of the Temple; Ambroise, the chronicler of the Third Crusade, describes the Muslims' banner as bearing the image of Mohammad (3367). Fulcher renders the Muslims' reverence of the Temple worthless because of their idolatry and worship of Mohammad<sup>40</sup>.

### **The accurate description of Islam:**

We have examined what the Crusader writers knew about Islam but we have barely touched upon the other ideas and teaching that go to make up Islam; the significance of a monotheistic God (though polytheism as an allegation against Islam has been dealt with), the teaching about Christ's position in Islam and the laws that govern a Muslim's life. What did the chroniclers know about Islam and how did they react to this knowledge?

The anonymous author of *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi* had some very accurate things to say about Islam. An example of this accuracy comes when our author described how a Muslim would react to the Christian teaching that Christ was the son of God. The question of Christ's divinity was put in an orthodox Muslim frame of reference and reflected, very accurately, the Muslim position in regard to the person of Christ; that is, Christ is one of the world's greatest prophets, but hardly God's son and God himself, for this would negate the idea of the single god, 'God the Absolute and Invisible', the central element in the Muslim concept of their God. He wrote thus:

Besides, they constantly made abusive remarks about the blessed Mary, mother of the Lord, and used coarse insults and abusive and shameful words... and the Son of God even though it was an established fact that there is only one God, by whom all things which have a beginning were begun, and that he has no one coeval with himself nor anyone sharing in his divinity ... and that to believe all this to be true would be nothing less than madness and contrary to our own salvation. Why did we not simply

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40. Fulcher of Charters, op.cit., Pp. 66, 69.

say that this son of Mary was a prophet, among the greatest of the prophets, since it was totally wrong for man to usurp the name of God<sup>41</sup>.

Later, in the same work, our author brought up this question of Christ's divinity again. He realized that this was the major cause for division between the Christians and the Muslims and though he was still quite theological, he was less willing to portray Muslim ideas and doctrines in the detached manner that we have seen above.

But, on this subject, that most loathsome people, the moors, tease us with the question why God, in all his wisdom, would have gone through all the bother of being born of woman and suffering at the hands of the sinners just so as to deliver mankind from its sins. Of course, he could have things in a different way, but even if he had done so the moors would still find some sort of fault with him<sup>42</sup>.

Islam was presented as having only one God, who was called 'Allah'. The author related a speech that the Muslim elders of the city of Lisbon were supposed to have made to the Crusaders, in which the Muslims emphasized the power and unity of their God:

I believe that this city did, indeed, once belong to your people; but now it is ours. In the future it may be yours; but everything depends on the will of God. While God wished it so, we have held it: when he changes his mind then we shall no longer hold it. For there nothing is impregnable against his will. Therefore, let us be happy with whatever pleases God, he who has so often saved our blood from your hands ... and, because of this fact, we do not cease to marvel at him and his powers, basically because he cannot be conquered, and because he overcomes misfortunes, sorrows and injuries for us<sup>43</sup>.

Some of the writers of the Third Crusade, notably Ambroise, described the Muslim position on the teaching that Christ was the son of God. In describing the deserters of the Christian army joining the Muslims, he wrote the following:

There were such acute shortages of everything that our men were sorely tried and were racked with hunger, and thus, many of our men deserted the army and

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41. De expugnatione Lyxbonensi. *The Conquest of Lisbon*. Edited and translated by C.W. David, New York, 1936, Pp. 130-132.

42. Ibid., p. 150.

43. Ibid., Pp.120-122.

deserted their God, went away and took refuge with the Turks. They said that it was obvious that no God would ever deign to be born of woman, and they went on to deny Baptism and the Crucifixion<sup>44</sup>.

The Crusader deserters thus denied that Christ was God incarnate and that he was born the son of God; just as a Muslim would. The author of the Templar letter stressed the fact that Islam was a monotheistic religion and that Mohammad was God's prophet. In the letter to Frederick that supposedly came from Saladin, a copy of which was included in the Templar letter, the Muslim God was always referred to as a singular God, thus:

... We have also obtained Jerusalem and its territory, by the virtue and power of God ... But if you (Frederick) wish for war, and if God wills it that we occupy the whole land of the Christians; we will meet you in the power of the lord, as is written in this, our letter ... We have written this letter for answer and may God give us counsel according to his will, this letter is written in the year of the coming of our prophet Mohammad 584, by the grace of the only God<sup>45</sup>.

Muslim dating is based on the number of lunar years that have passed since the Hegira, which is the flight of Mohammad from Mecca to Medina. Our author used the date 584 which corresponds to the year 1188 in the Christian calendar and which appears to be the correct date. As I noted above, the Templar letter appears to have been pieced together from a number of different sources; it is quite conceivable that this letter is genuine.

What of the later writers on the Spanish frontier; did they have anything to add? Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada was the only writer to take any real interest in the theological difference between Islam and Christianity. There is no penetrating study of the role that Christ played in Islamic doctrine such as the anonymous author of *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi* had conducted, but he did have some

44. Ambroise, *The Crusade of Richard Lion-Heart*, Translated by Merton Hubert with notes by J. La Monte, New York, 1941, p. 116.

45. Das Itinerarium peregrinorum. *Eine zeitgenossische englische Chronik zum dritten Kreuzzug in ursprünglicher Gestalt*, Edited by H.E. Mayer, Stuttgart, 1962, P. 288.

interesting things to say, for he realized that Mohammad was regarded as God's Messenger, the last of a series of prophets of whom Christ was one. Rodrigo, supposedly quoting from the Koran, narrated the story of Mohammad's ascent to the heavens, the *mi'rāj*)<sup>46</sup>. In this story, Mohammad guided by the archangel Gabriel, is taken to Jerusalem where he meets the prophets from the previous dispensations.

And on such a beast (i.e. the mythical beast called the 'Alborac') Mohammad came to Jerusalem, such as his book (the Koran) says. He came to the place where Abraham, Moses and Jesus and the other prophets from ancient times were waiting to revere him, and they offered him three vessels; first containing milk, second containing wine and third containing water. And he heard a voice from heaven saying this: "If you take the vessel full of water, then your people will be drowned. If you take the one of wine then your people will be lost. If you take the vessel containing the milk then you and your people will be in command". He took the milk and drank it and then the angel Gabriel told him:

"Now you are the leader, you and all who believe in your law". ... Gabriel added the following: "Come and see" said he. And there was Abraham, Moses and Jesus, their eyes watchful and vigilant in their sleeping bodies. Abraham was similar in appearance to me (Mohammad), Moses, however, was curly-haired and his hair was full of brambles, while Jesus, son of Mary, had golden hair neither long nor short but his disposition and stature suggested imminent collapse, and water sprang from his head notwithstanding that water should not have been flowing from this point<sup>47</sup>.

This is very close to what Guillaume (1955) wrote in his life of Mohammad. In this account, however, there were only two choices, milk and wine. Rodrigo was well-aware that Christ's position in the Islamic religion was

46. Guillaume, A. *The Life of Mohammad*, Oxford, 1955, Pp. 181-187; Horovitz, J. *Mi 'radj. Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 5: 505-508, Leiden, 1913.

47. Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, *Historia Arabum*, edited by J. L. Sanchez. Seville. 1974, p. 9.



inferior to that of Mohammad; Christ was an equal of the prophets of old, all of whom now revered Mohammad. Rodrigo then described Mohammad's journey through seven heavens, each of which contained an earlier Prophet of God. Mohammad met Adam in the first heaven; Jesus in the second, Joseph in the third, Idris in the fourth, Aaron in the fifth, Moses in the sixth and Abraham in the seventh. In the seventh heaven Gabriel announced who was his companion:

"This is Mohammad". And they asked with joy in their voices: "Has he been sent for?" and Gabriel declared: "Now is the time of the message". And all there prayed to God that he would come to me as his friend and brother<sup>48</sup>.

This material came directly from the Holy Koran and Hadith stories concerning the *mi'rāj*. This is so clear in the Koran Surat al-Takwīr (81): 19-25 and Surat al-Isrā' (17): 1-12 describe a vision in which a heavenly messenger appears to Mohammad, while Surat al-Isrā' (17): 12-18 deals with a second message of a similar kind.

On the Syrian frontier it was not until the advent of the Fifth Crusade that any other writer showed as much interest in Islam as the anonymous author of *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi* and Rodrigo. Oliver of Paderborn made the same sort of close comparisons between Islam and Christianity as the anonymous author had, and again, the comparison revolved around the question of the divinity of Christ. In his letter to the sultan of Egypt, Oliver discussed some of the differences that were seen to exist between Islam and Christianity. Its form was that of a document purporting to convert the sultan to Christianity. It thanks the sultan for his kindness in respect of his provisioning the Crusaders after their defeat outside Damietta and then launched into an attack on Islam, with an attempt to defend Christianity against some of the Muslims' criticisms. Oliver wrote this at the beginning of his letter:

That would you admit the divinity of Jesus Christ and the mysteries of

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48. De Rada, Op.Cit., p. 11

the incarnation, the death of Jesus Christ and that we could make known to you the life in heaven, so that you could believe. So that, in the future, you will judge in agreement with us on the conception, nativity and ascension: you are able to believe that Christ was a great prophet and the holiest of men, never sinning or making mistakes ...<sup>49</sup>

Various things can be said about the Muslim position regarding Jesus Christ. Mohammad taught that Jesus Christ was miraculously born of the Virgin Mary, near the trunk of palm tree and that he was able to perform miracles such as giving life to a clay figure of a bird, healing the blind, quickening the dead and bringing down a table from heaven 'as a festival and a sign'. Mohammad also taught that Jesus was specially commissioned as the prophet of God, to confirm the law and reveal the gospel. Interestingly, Mohammad taught that Christ foretold the advent of another prophet, whose name should be Ahmad and that, far from being crucified, the Jews had crucified a likeness of Jesus Christ, and not the Christ himself, for God had deceived them in this (Surat al-Nisā' (4): 157; Surat al-Saff (61): 5). Christ was seen as being in one of the stages of celestial bliss and he would come again on the Last Day and slay the Anti-Christ. As regards Christ's followers, Mohammad taught that following Christ's departure from this earth, his disciples disputed among themselves, some calling him a God, and making him one of the trinity of the 'Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'. Jesus, it was taught, was not the son of God. The Koran explicitly says as much:

The Jews say Ezra is the son of God; and the Christian say that the Messiah is the son of God; that is what they say with their mouths imitating the sayings of those who misbelieved before-God fight them-how they lie (Surat al-Tawbah (9):30).

Though the Muslims denied the Trinity and more especially that Christ was the son of God, Oliver stressed that the person of Christ occupied a special position in

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49. Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatana*, edited by H. Hoogeweg (Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins Stuttgart, 202). Tübingen, 1894, p. 296.

Islam:

Mohammad, himself, praises the lord of the Christians above everyone else. You (the sultan) profess that God implanted great riches, much patience and refinement of manner in him; and that he died with honor and dignity; and that Jesus Christ, our lord, a holy man, his mother the holiest of women, cried out with great voice when his spirit and was let out, this through the testament of a centurion asserted as being correct who said: 'Truly he was the son of God'... In truth it is you who are unbelievers for, while acknowledging that Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin, you deny that he is the true son of God because of your hard and impenetrable hearts. We confess three Gods in one, three personalities, one omnipotent being, eternal, invisible, incomprehensible, unutterable, high above all creatures ...<sup>50</sup>

The Muslims believed Jesus to have been a great prophet and the holiest of men, yet did not believe him to be the son of God; The Koran was therefore dealt with very carefully; Oliver even acknowledged it to be a divine work. He stated that:

He (Mohammad), himself, brought to light a miraculous testimonial and divine work, and he cited Jesus Christ in his book, just as you and we<sup>51</sup>.

He elaborated further on the usefulness of the Koran in justifying the Christian faith and sent this letter to the 'learned men of Egypt':

That Christ lived an innocent life, holy, just, pious and clearly in great virtue is acknowledged in your book of law. What is fitting is that there should be some sort of discussion which will compel one or other to be victorious in religious authority. It is agreed that the law that he gave is irreprehensible, honest and wholesome; that testament seems enough, but you deny the findings of the evangelical scripture as well as

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50. Oliver of Paderborn, Op.Cit., Pp. 300-306

51. Ibid., p. 300.

believing that your own conclusions contradict it<sup>52</sup>.

This letter was written in the form of a theological disputation that was an outright attack on Mohammad and his teachings, and though Oliver started off by noting the similarity between the two religions, he carried on to say that as 'Christ was foreseen and as Mohammad was not, Christianity was the only true religion'<sup>53</sup>. Oliver also realized that the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity was unacceptable to the Muslims. In his *Historia Damiatina*, when he described the surrender of the Christian forces, he wrote, the documents of the contracts were completed by both sides, oaths were sworn and hostages named. The sultan, therefore, placing his right hand on the paper that he had just signed, swore in this way:

"I, al-Kamil, sultan of Egypt, from a pure heart and with goodwill, and without interruption, do swear by the lord, by the lord, by the lord and my law, that I will, in good faith, observe all things that this written paper under my hand contains. If I fail to do so may I be separated from future judgment and the society of Mohammad, and may I acknowledge the father, son and Holy Ghost"<sup>54</sup>.

Al-Ashraf and al-Mu'azzam, and their more eminent amir, also swore in this same manner. It is very unlikely that al-Kamil or any of the Muslims could have been brought to swear such an oath. Oliver was also well aware of the fact that the Muslims looked upon the Christians, with their practice of revering the holy family and the saints in iconography, as idolatrous; an accusation Oliver vehemently denied in his letter to the sultan.

You call us idolaters, who worship created things. We are far from being idolaters, a practice prohibited by his natural law and his very laws ban its practice. We worship and adore God, our father who is in heaven, and, in truth, God is great; and we worship just him. The holy cross and other images that we adore with such slave-like feelings, we do out of remembrance of Christ's

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52. Oliver of Paderborn, Op.Cit., p. 310.

53. Ibid., p. 313.

54. Ibid., p. 257.

humanity<sup>55</sup>.

That his statement was made in reaction to Muslim accusations is plainly stated:

Your suggestion (of idolatry) is false, for we simply pray to the blessed virgin Mary and the holy ones; and, because we know of their holiness and their ability to make holy supplication, we pray to them so that they may intervene for us ... We do not worship them – for that place only God can take<sup>56</sup>.

The only point of contact that appeared to lie between the two faiths was the importance that both faiths attached to the 'Word of God'. Islam is a religion of the word, as would have been evident to Oliver if he had ever set foot in a mosque, and the concept of the word of God exists both in the Koran and in the Gospel. If the Muslims could ascribe the word to Allah, why not the breath as well; which Oliver called the spirit? The spirit is, of course, one element of the Holy Trinity and if the Muslims were to admit to the existence of the spirit of Allah they would be well on the way to being as 'polytheistic' as the Christians were supposed to be. Oliver then embroiled himself in some rather tortuous theology, appearing to base himself very much on the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. John: 'In the beginning was the word; and the word was with God; and the word was God'. The 'Word' (from the Greek word 'logos' meaning reason or word) is a designation for Christ himself. Scripture makes a distinction between the word of God 'written', in the Scriptures, and the word of God 'incarnate', that is, Jesus Christ. 'Logos' does not simply mean the spoken word but also means the mind behind it as well.

The word of God and the spirit of God which as you say, I call the father, were conceived of God in the virgin's womb, and this I avow of the Holy Spirit. You acknowledge the moral excellence of God just as I do ... The breath of God is nothing other than the word of God. Therefore the word of God (and in the beginning was the word and the word was with God) was certainly God. Your people call us unbelievers; we, who believe in one in Trinity and worship the

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55. Oliver of Paderborn, Op.Cit., p. 297.

56. Ibid., p. 298.

Trinity in one united. When you sign David's psalm (66:8): 'Bless us God, God, our God, Bless us God, you name God three times, and one may say that you do not know the words of strength for you divide God in three'<sup>57</sup>.

The ambiguity and blurring of the distinctions that set Islam and Christianity apart is hardly convincing and would not sound remotely convincing to a Muslim but then Oliver might not have known this. But what was the purpose of this passage, indeed, what was the purpose of the letter? It was a letter thanking the sultan for helping the Christian after their defeat at Mansourah in A.D. 1250<sup>58</sup> but its other purpose was to get the sultan to make his brother hand back Jerusalem and the Holy Land to the Christians. The third aim of this letter seems to have been an attempt to convert the sultan to Christianity. Oliver was at pains to sweep away all the misconceptions that a Muslims might have about Christianity and to state how closely they think on certain issues; the antipathy to image-worship and the mutual belief in all-powerful monotheistic God and so on. The sticking point was the person and teaching of Mohammad, who was simply described as deriving his opinions from the Devil and Sergius, a heretic. Oliver saw his task as trying to convert the heretic back to Catholicism and within this context laid the discussion about Christ's role and the position of the Trinity in the Christian religion. Oliver seems to have thought that it was only by educating the Muslim in the truth faith that he would be converted. Islam and Christianity were compared to show not so much that Christianity was a religion close to Islam, but that Christianity was the religion that had, up until then, been misrepresented to the Muslims. Thus with this context in mind we can understand Oliver's concern to describe Islam accurately in so far as its similarities to Christianity<sup>59</sup>. James of Vitry certainly knew a great deal about Islam as well. He had this to say by way of comparison between Islam and Christianity:

In some respects the Muslims agree with the Christians for they too believe in one, single, omnipotent God, the creator of everything; but

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57. Oliver of Paderborn, Op.Cit., Pp 296-297.

58. Neillands, R, *The Hundred Years War*, London, 2001, p. 21.

59. Mastnak, T. *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order*, Berkeley, 2002 , Pp. 87 96.

they do not believe in the Trinity and detest our faith and deride us as worshipping three Gods, they do not believe that he is the son of the father but merely flesh and in this they do not care to understand his incarnation: for flesh and blood has not revealed this (i.e. Christ's real nature as being the son of God) but (my) our father who is in heaven<sup>60</sup>.

Even the anonymous author of the *Gesta Obsidionis Damiate*, a much shorter account of the Crusader attack on Damietta during the Fifth Crusade, was aware of the main points at disagreement between the two religions; that is to say, the disagreement over whether or not Christ was God and if there was such a thing as the Holy Trinity. The author was not overly interested in the religious aspects of Islam, for him it was sufficient to state the following:

And send us your angels of heaven, who are with us and teach us, so that we will be able to overcome the enemies of the cross, and those who do not believe in trinity and rules as God<sup>61</sup>.

Leaving the question as to how the Christians and Muslims differed in their views of Christ, James had some interesting views in regard to the Koran, for he was far more scathing about it than Oliver had been<sup>62</sup>. He was disgusted that Mohammad should have felt himself at liberty to pick and chose from the Bible:

He (Mohammad) accepted the laws of Moses and all the books of the prophets and apostles to whom God had spoken; he did not deny their holiness. He even acknowledged the psalms and all the books of the Old Testament (as from God), had them translated and interpreted ... But he took the law of the Jews either literally, according to scripture, or else he perverted it and this (the Muslims) hold to be their doctrine. Moreover, they read the Gospel of our lord Jesus Christ yet did not understand it: they acknowledge as true all that Christ said. Similarly the apostles, who were converted to Christ, became pure men and were called such by

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60. (Matthew 16:17).

61. *Gesta obsidionis Damiate*, op. cit., Pp. 80-82 in *Quinti belli sacri scriptores minores*, edited by R. Röhrich, Societe de L'orient Latin: série historique 2. Geneva. 1879 , p. 81.

62. James of Vitry, *Historia Orientalis*, edited by F. Moschus, Farnborough, 1971 , Pp. 20-21

Mohammad in his book<sup>63</sup>.

In many respects he was correct for the Koran does, indeed, contain many elements from the Old and new Testaments, though this is not to deny its divine nature. Of more interest was his perception of Muslim fatalism, a very penetrating observation of Muslim theology:

He (Mohammad) said that they (his followers) had no need to fear death, for God had foreseen the last day and that nothing was hidden from his view. Truly whatever ending (i.e. deaths) they had coming; God had already foreseen it and was infallible in so doing. He was able to anticipate all that man was to do<sup>64</sup>.

This fatalism was something that John of Joinville also noted:

Another belief of theirs is that no man can die before the day appointed for his death. This is a belief no man should hold, seeing that God has the power to prolong our lives or to shorten them<sup>65</sup>.

John of Joinville certainly seemed to be very concerned about the subject of predestination and was at pains to stress the fact that predestination was not part of the doctrine of the Christian faith. Islam and Christianity had nothing in common on this subject:

... since I returned from the land overseas I have come across certain disloyal Christians who follow the Bedouin faith, and they say that no man can die except on the appointed day. This belief is, in effect, disloyalty to our religion, since it amounts to saying that God has no power to help us. We would, indeed, be foolish if we were to serve God if we did not think he has the power to prolong our lives and to

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63. James of Vitry, *Op.Cit.*, p. 23.

64. *Ibid.*, p 28.

65. *Ibid.*, Pp. 250-252.



preserve us from evil and misfortune<sup>66</sup>.

On the Syrian frontier there were a number of Crusader writers, both native and foreign, who took a great deal of interest in the Islamic religion; such as the author of the Templar Letter who was resident in the region and Ambroise and Oliver of Paderborn who were foreign in the sense that they were in the East for only a short time. Even an early foreign writer like Ambroise appreciated that it was the question of Christ's divinity that divided the two faiths, but his writings are in no way comparable to the depth of knowledge that the author of *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi* displayed. James of Vitry and Oliver of Paderborn, highly educated, were very well-informed and were accurate up to the point that they accused the Muslims of being heretics.

The question facing us is this: was this concern with Islamic theology in any way extraordinary? Norman Daniel did not think so. He believed anti-Islamic polemic improved radically as the Crusades ran their course. He was using a far greater spectrum of sources – not specifically eyewitness accounts – but some of his arguments are useful in the present context:

The argument brought forward against Islam by even the most learned and intellectual men of the thirteenth century would have left Muslims very little impressed. The abuse of the prophet, of course, would have angered them ... Christian writers never got at the roots of Islam. Not even their subtlest arguments ... or to defeat them (the Muslims) in debate. Only one conclusion is possible, as I have argued in greater detail elsewhere. They were intended for that if they could presented as having successfully silenced Muslims in debates which can rarely have happened at all, and never profitably<sup>67</sup>.

Daniel (1979) dismissed the idea that Christian writers were seriously concerned about the likelihood of Islamic doctrine being, in some manner, infectious. He wrote that 'Islam was never believed to be a dangerously attractive

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66. James, Op.Cit., p.140.

67. Daniel, *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe*, op. cit., p. 246.

proposition' and he was correct to write this. But conversion to Islam was a real possibility to Crusaders captured by the Muslims and forced to convert to Islam. This was one reason why the Crusaders took a very real interest in Islam.

### **Social Position and Some Approaches of Crusaders Lifestyle in the East:**

Pope Urban II in his speech at Clermont tried to limit the participation of women in the forthcoming Crusade; he may have imagined that a Crusade without women would be more effective from the military point of view, but the sexual morality of this exclusion cannot be overruled. Nevertheless, married women with their husbands, unmarried women, camp followers, and prostitutes accompanied the holy warriors from the first to the last Crusades. The positive side of the presence of women in the army – encouraging and bringing water to the fighters and even fighting side by side with men – was not denied by Crusader historians<sup>68</sup>. Yet women were treated as unclean and contagious objects since the apogee of spirituality can be achieved, first of all, through sexual purity. Conceived as mere copies of Eve who seduced the innocent Adam and in the light of the Midianite women who ensnared the Hebrew holy fighters (Numbers 25:18), women Crusaders were often considered as the culprits of the devil to be shunned.

From the very beginning of the Crusades, when the Crusaders were besieging Nicaea, victory was pre-conditioned by sexual purity; according to this 'purity game' women were the impure players to be banished from the Crusader camp in precarious times to allow the holy fighters to regain their lost spirituality; in peaceful and prosperous times women were allowed again into the camp. The two sieges of Antioch provided a typical example of Crusader sexual behavior. Arriving before the walls of Antioch with plenty of provisions and in no imminent danger, the Crusaders satisfied their sexual appetites to the full; with the siege prolonged, supplies becoming scarce, and defeat almost imminent, the Crusaders mended their ways mainly by sexual abstinence, fasting and prayers; both married and unmarried women were driven out of the camp 'lest they, stained by the defilement of dissipation, displease the Lord'<sup>69</sup>. Once Antioch was seized and the

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68. Hill, *op.cit.*, p. 19; Gabrieli, *op.cit.*, Pp. 183, 207.

69. Fulcher of Chartres, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

Crusaders were within the walls of the city, they reverted to their licentiousness; the 'prophets' of the Crusade, with their apocalyptic dreams, ordered the sinful to put an end to their indulgence. Christ himself made an appearance to one visionary to rebuke the Crusaders for satisfying their 'filthy lust' with both Christian and pagan women, so that 'a great stench goes to heaven'<sup>70</sup>. Rape and mutilation were the usual fate of captured Muslim women, and that is why Fulcher of Chartres<sup>71</sup>, an eye witness, boasted once that the Christian knights did no harm to Muslim women except piercing their bellies.

St. Bernard could think only in sexual terms to express his successful preaching for the Second Crusade; he prided himself on depopulating Europe leaving only one man for every seven women. The chronicler of the Third Crusade spoke of the harlots who 'plied the trade of lust and shame' in the Crusader camp<sup>72</sup>, yet he presents us with an idealistic picture of the Crusaders whose abstinence made most of this 'idealism':

A hundred thousand men died there because from women they abstained; 'it was for God's love that they restrained themselves. They had not perished thus, had they not been abstemious'<sup>73</sup>.

One knight caught in the act of adultery was judged by King Louis either to be led by rope through the camp by the prostitute or to be dismissed from the army; the knight preferred the second choice<sup>74</sup>. After arriving in France, the king discharged a great number of his soldiers because of their sexual indulgence: when the Crusader hosts in Egypt were suffering their greatest distress and defeat was obvious, these soldiers used to gather for their debauches at a place very near to the king's pavilion<sup>75</sup>. The king might have inferred that the collapse of his Crusade was due to these sexual transgressions.

Crusader literature shows clearly the ambivalence relating to sexual conduct;

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70. Gesta, op. cit., p. 58.

71. Fulcher of Chartres, op.cit., p. 54.

72. Ambroise, op. cit., Chapter VI, p. 7041.

73. Ambroise, op. cit., Chapter XI, p 12237; Gabrieli, op. cit., Pp. 204-205.

74. Shaw, op.cit., Pp. 292, 316.

75. Ibid., p. 207.

while the clergy and some leaders tried to put some restraints on the fighters' sexuality, the majority ignored such regulations except in time of major crisis; when such measures were imposed, any violation meant severe punishment, since the wrath of heaven would be common not individual and because of the contagious nature of sin, in particular sexual ones. Penance, sexual abstinence, and crisis were three interrelated elements in the ideology of the Crusades<sup>76</sup>.

In this sexually obsessed atmosphere, Crusader writers kept on repeating the worn-out refrain that Muslims leaders spurred their troops forward promising them sexual opportunities with beautiful Christian women. Muslim women in Crusader literature sacrifice everything; they betray their parents, and give up their religion when they fall in love with Christian heroes. Polygamy in Islam was caricatured and given a military dimension; the prophet Mohammad was portrayed as a sexual libertine intent on breaking up holy Christianity especially the institution of marriage and virginity.

Two problems vexed medieval theologians and canonists when they tackled the Crusades in relation to women and sexuality: first, there was the difficulty of reconciling the obligations resulting from the bond of marriage with that of the Crusade; second, there was the continuous and perplexing problem of how to deal with the plight of women left behind and those whose husbands failed to return. The extent of these problems can be evaluated from St. Bernard's statement that he almost depopulated Europe from men in the Second Crusade, and from the practice of some Crusaders who suffered their wives to wear the painful and dangerous chastity belts during their absence in Syria. Gradually, the canonists solved the problems at the expense of women. Gratian, in the first half of the twelfth century, would not allow the physical separation of married couples save by mutual consent<sup>77</sup>. When the Crusader institution was endangered and the Third Crusade stopped short of regaining Jerusalem, pragmatism and military necessity prevailed. Although the wives' consent had never been a real problem for the Crusaders, Pope Innocent in his decrees (1201) laid down a new radical provision – men, accordingly, were free to make and fulfill their Crusade vows without their

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76. Hillenbrand, *The Crusades, Islamic perspectives*, Edinburgh, 1999, Pp. 347-348.

77. Brundage, J. The Crusade's Wife: A Canonistic Quandary. *Studia Gratiana* 12: 425-441. 1967, p. 431.

wives' prior approval; the same decrees, as a compensation, that women were allowed to accompany their husbands in the Crusades<sup>78</sup>.

Hostiensi, in the second half of the thirteenth century, was dubious about women's participation in the Crusade out of fear for their chastity during the journey. A women traveling alone was regarded as suspicious. Hostiensis made two conditions concerning women Crusaders: age and financial status. Elderly and wealthy matrons of good reputation could fulfill their Crusade vows in person since they would bring with them a large number of warriors. Young women, or those of doubtful reputation, should redeem their Crusade vows with money subsidies in aid of the Holy Land. He also dealt with the canonical position of a harlot who vowed to go crusading; she could neither fulfill her vow in person, so as not to beguile other Crusaders, nor could she redeem her ill-begotten money<sup>79</sup>. Johannes Faventius (1171) enjoined that if a Crusader died on his journey, his wife ought to observe continence for so long as it would have taken her husband to complete his pilgrimage had he lived<sup>80</sup>. It was enacted also that if a Crusader died and his wife remarried, she had to allow her husband to have sex with her whenever he liked; but she was not to seek sex with him of her own desire<sup>81</sup>.

It is very probable that those Franks who came on Crusade and stayed on in the Levant intermarried for the most part with Oriental Christian women. However, some Franks must also have married Muslim women or have taken Muslim concubines. Unfortunately, confirmation of this is hard to find in the sources. Marriages between Crusaders and Oriental Christians would not merit a mention in Islamic sources but occasional comments suggest – not surprisingly in view of the relatively small number of Crusaders women who must have come out to the Levant – that Crusader-Muslim marriages, especially in the lower echelons of society, must have occurred.

Well-born Frankish women who fell into Muslim hands were spared enslavement if they were young and pretty. Badran Ibn Malik, a scion of the

78. Brundage, Op.Cit., Pp. 434-435; Hillenbrand, op. cit.

79. Brundage, J. The Votive Obligations of Crusaders: The Development of a Canonistic Doctrine. *Traditio* 24:77-118. 1968. Pp. 77-118; Brundage, J. *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader*. Madison. 1969. Pp. 102-103.

80. Brundage, The Crusade's Wife ,op cit., p. 433

81. Finucane, op. cit., p183.

‘Uqaylids, a Bedouin Arab dynasty that held Qal‘at Ja‘bar for several generations, was the son of the union between his father and a beautiful Frankish girl who had been taken prisoner on a pilgrimage to Afamiyya and was sent to Malik as a present by Usama’s father, and after the death of Malik she escaped from Qal‘at Ja‘bar and got married again from a Frankish shoemaker<sup>82</sup>. Another story is that of a family which had been sent to Usama's parental home. The head of the family was an old woman, who was accompanied by one of her daughters and a young, strongly built son. The son, Raoul, converted to Islam, and made a great pretence of fervour in his prayer and fasting. He was apprenticed to a sculptor of marble, and was rewarded for his loyal service by a marriage to a woman from a pious Muslim family. This woman bore her converted husband two sons. When the children were both still under seven years of age, their father fled taking all their household possessions. He returned to the Franks at Apamea (Arabic Afamia), and became as fervent a Christian as he had been a Muslim, and disregarded his Islamic marriage in favour of a new marriage to a Christian woman<sup>83</sup>. Ibn Jubayr (d. H 614/AD 1217), whose impressions of Crusader Tyre are much more positive than of Acre, includes a detailed account of a Crusader wedding procession near the town that he witnessed personally. He described the event as ‘an alluring worldly spectacle deserving of record’<sup>84</sup>. The bride was clad most elegantly, in a beautiful dress from which trailed, according to their traditional style, a long train of golden silk. On her head she wore a golden diadem covered by a net of woven gold, and on her breast was a like arrangement. Her ‘alluring attractions’ moved Ibn Jubayr to write: ‘proud she was in her ornaments and dress’. Walking with little steps of half a span, like a dove, or in the manner of a wisp of cloud’<sup>85</sup>. Ibn Jubayr then protected himself as usual from the dangers of praising the Franks, adding carefully and sententiously: “God protect us from the seductions of the sight.” The procession involved many of the town’s wealthy people and was

82. Ibn Shaddād, Muhammad ibn ‘Alī (d. H 648/AD 1234), *al-A‘laq al-khatīrah fī dhikr umarā’ al-shām wa-al-jazīrah*, edited by S. al-Dahhan, Beirut, 1963, Pp. 333-340; Ibn Munqidh, Usama, *Kitāb al-Itibār*, edited by P. Hitti, Beirut, 1983, Pp. 159-160.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

84. Ibn Jubayr, Muhammad ibn Ahmad (d.H.614/Ad1217), *Tadhkirat al-akhbār ‘an ittifāqāt al-asfār, 1182-1185*, edited by H. Nassar, Cairo, 1952, p. 320.

85. *Ibid.*, 320.

watched by Muslims and Christians alike<sup>86</sup>.

The early history of the Latin states showed that the Franks rapidly assimilated some of the customs of the country and established good relations with their Muslim neighbors and subjects<sup>87</sup>. Usama stated clearly that some Franks had adopted a Muslim lifestyle: "Amongst the Franks there is a group who have become acclimatized and have associated with Muslims"<sup>88</sup>. But these, he declared, were an exception.

The sources of Crusading history give numerous instances in which the manners of the Franks were modified after their settlement in Syria. It can be shown that the Franks employed Syrian doctors, cooks, servants and artisans. They clothed themselves in eastern garments and included in their diet the fruits and dishes of the country. They had glass in their windows, mosaics on their floors and fountains in the courtyards of their houses, which were planned on the Syrian model<sup>89</sup>.

"They had dancing girls at their entertainments; professional mourners at their funerals; took baths; used soap; ate sugar"<sup>90</sup>

It is unrealistic to expect the medieval Islamic chroniclers to give us detailed portraits of Individual Franks: even their descriptions of Muslims were stereotypically. But it is interesting to note that the Islamic sources began to draw a distinction between those Franks who had lived for sometime in the Levant and those who had recently arrived from Europe. Usama made such a distinction between Orientalized and western Franks in a much-quoted passage of his memories: 'Everyone who is a fresh emigrant from the Frankish lands is ruder in character than those who have become acclimatized and have held long association with the Muslims'<sup>91</sup>. Usama described the lifestyle of one orientalized Frank who was visited in his house by a friend of Usama. The friend went on to say:

We came to the house of one of the old knights who had come out in

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86. Ibn Jubayr, Op.Cit., 320.

87. Smail, R. C, *Crusading Warfare (1097-1193)*, Cambridge. 1956. p. 43.

88. Ibn Munqidh, op. cit., p. 140.

89. Smail, op. cit., p. 41.

90. Ibid., p. 43.

91. Ibn Munqidh, op. cit., p. 163,134.

the Franks first expedition. He had been removed from the register and service and had a property in Antioch from which he lived. He brought out a fine table and extremely clean and excellent food. He saw me refraining from eating and said: 'Eat, set your mind at rest, for I don't eat the franks' food. I have Egyptian women cooks. I eat only what they have cooked and no pork enters my house. So I ate, albeit warily, and we left<sup>92</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

The previous discussion has shown that there were considerable points of contact and influence between Muslims and Crusaders at many levels over more than two centuries. But it is still difficult to generalize how the Muslims really felt about the Crusaders. The existence of treaties and the reality of regular contact do not, in any way, infer that the Muslims respected or liked them, either individually or as a group. It is not surprising that the cultural interaction between Muslim and Crusaders should have been almost entirely in one direction. The Muslims felt that they had little to learn from Europe in the religious, social and cultural aspects. The Crusaders, on the other hand, had much to learn from the lifestyle of the Muslims who had lived in the Near East for many centuries and were fully adapted to the climate and the land. It was in everyday life that the Crusaders were probably most influenced by Islamic mores, and they came to identify themselves over generations as Levantines.

The Crusaders had a genius for colonization and even in those lands – the east – they lost their name and, above all, the justice of their rule has been forgotten. So it was in Syria that twelfth-century French justice guaranteed to each class of its eastern subjects the enjoyment of its own rights and native custom. They adopted the costumes and manners of the Easterners, learned their language, maintained close and friendly relations with them in times of peace. The result was the intermarriage of East and West. The Latin states, it is said, were peopled by a cosmopolitan yet integrated society in which the various racial and religious elements were happily blended, and which had an inner life and strength.

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92. Ibn Jubayr, *Op.Cit.*, p. 140.



## التأثير المتبادل بين الصليبيين والمسلمين في الشرق: الأسطورة والواقع.

معن عموش\*

### ملخص

جمعت بين الديانة المسيحية والإسلامية علاقة تاريخية إمتدت لأكثر من ألف وأربعمائة عام حُدَّت في عصر الحروب الصليبية، وهي الفترة التي كثيراً ما توصف بأنها كارثية وشهدت اشتباكات بين الفريقين. وتم خوض سلسلة من الحروب المقدسة لكل دين وقد إختبر كلا الطرفين ذلك خلال الحملات الصليبية والجهاد والتي كان لها بلا شك أكبر الأثر على كيفية تطوير العلاقة بينهما على مر السنين. وكان هناك العديد من الحقائق التي تولدت نتيجة هذه المدة الطويلة مما أسهم إلى حد كبير جداً في خلق العديد من التصورات وقد استمرت مثل تلك التصورات حتى الوقت الحاضر.

لسوء الحظ، فإن العديد من التصورات، لا سيما تلك التي تناولت التأكيد على الكراهية العميقة الجذور بين أتباع الديانتين، مما أدى إلى التعصب الأصولي، كانت صحيحة. وعندما بدأت الحروب الصليبية، لم يكن هناك على ما يبدو من سبيل لوقفها، ومع تكرار فترات النزاع ازداد انعدام الثقة وسوء الفهم والكراهية والتي غالباً ما تمثلت بشكلٍ صريح بين أتباع الديانتين. وكانت السيطرة على القدس، الأرض المقدسة للديانات الثلاث، بلا شك محور الحرب الصليبية التي شهدتها منطقة شرق المتوسط والتي إستمرت بين مدي وجزر لقرنين من الزمن تقريباً، وتميزت هذه الفترة بنشوب نزاعات دينية مكثفة لقادة كل من المعتقدين، وتم الزعم أن هذه النزاعات قامت من أجل قضية عادلة. وحتى الآن، وعلى الرغم من الأمثلة الواضحة على التعصب والعنف التي وسمت الفترة بحيث تم وصفها بأنها حرب صليبية، لا يزال هناك الكثير مما ينبغي القيام به على أمل الحصول على وجهة نظر مثالية تتمثل بعملية مراجعة ووضع تصورات لفهم طبيعة العلاقة بين المسلمين والمسيحيين أثناء الحروب الصليبية. وسيقوم هذا البحث بتعريف من هم الصليبيون والتفاعل بينهم وبين المسلمين ووجهات نظرهم حول بعضهم البعض ونهج كل من الديانتين - الإسلام والمسيحية، خلال الحملات الصليبية.

الكلمات الدالة: الصليبيون، المسلمون، الأسطورة، الواقع، التفاعل.

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